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This document points out the link between racism and education as interrelated social institutions, analyzes educators' positions on the issue, and offers a concept of educational integration. Within a racist society the schools and its teachers will perforce reflect the dominant pattern in all the components of education. A racist attitude among teachers and school professionals is completely unprofessional, and is predicated on both a falsehood about racial inferiority and a dishonest posture of color blindness or neutrality. Segregation is in fact an abnormal type of relationship, whereas integration is a truly normal one wherein both races would accept each other and work together on an equal footing. The major locus of change must be the white community which has been responsible for structuring this abnormal relationship. A genuine integration effort should be teacher-initiated and comprehensive, to eradicate segregation throughout the field of education. The emphasis on racial balance in the schools only avoids the need to confront the intangible aspects of racism. (NH)

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Calls for Commitment to School Integration

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Educators and the Racial Issue in Education

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The time is long overdue for a meaningful dialogue among educators--teachers and officials—on the issue of racism in education. The question may be fairly put: Can we have progress that will reach into the hearts and minds of children unless there first is progress in the hearts and minds of educators? Yet, as things stand today, it is possible to assert that professional personnel, through their inertia and resistance, constitute a major obstacle to educational integration. What might be considered a necessary pre-condition for progress—an active and penetrating dialogue out of which an adequate understanding might emerge—hardly exists among teachers.

There has been much discussion recently of the status of the school integration movement. The Coleman report issued by the Office of Education [1] and the *Racial Isolation* study of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights[2] differ on the precise benefits of what integration there

[1] James S. Coleman et. al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, Report of Survey Submitted to President and Congress under Section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, U. S. Office of Education, 1966.

[2] U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial Isolation in Public Schools* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), Vol. I, and Vol. II.

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has been. More important, the cutting edge of the civil rights school integration movement seems blunted as resistance and attrition take their toll of supporting organizations. Despite the broad support for integration in the Negro community, the ensuing frustration has helped Black Nationalists in New York City put forth a program aimed at local control of schools—much to the glee of white anti-integrationists. But the argument of black militants is a serious one: Negro children must be protected from mental and moral destruction by white-controlled educational institutions. Jonathan Kozol's book, *Death at an Early Age*, comes at an opportune time to support this thesis. Its sub-title is *The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in Boston Public Schools.*[3]

Nevertheless, it is not likely that the issue of school integration will fade away. What has happened so far may be best viewed as merely the opening stages of a fundamental struggle in American education. The largely passive role played by teachers indicates the limited character of the approach to integration up till now. The main protagonists have been elements external to the professional community such as civil rights groups, their opponents in white areas, and in the courts.

The general passivity (extending at times to foot-dragging resistance) among teachers and the absence of serious discussion reinforce the notion that most professional personnel view the racial question as one that is external or at best peripheral to education. Implicit in this outlook is identification of the problem with the civil rights movement, whose pressures brought it to the fore, rather than with education. This view appears confirmed by the occasional imposition on schools of certain tasks, such as improved racial balance, as a result of reluctant changes in community social policy stemming from these pressures. Such tasks are seen as similar to other responsibilities, marginal to education, which historically have been thrust on schools by outside groups.

If this is the prevailing, though usually unspoken, opinion in the professional community, it is necessary to ask: Is the racial question, then, one primarily external to education? Or, on the other hand, does it go to the heart of the teaching-learning process and to the core of the role and responsibilities of teachers?

The purpose of this article is to show in a systematic discussion the link between racism and education, to analyze the posture of educators on this question, and to present a concept of integration in education.

[3] (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967).

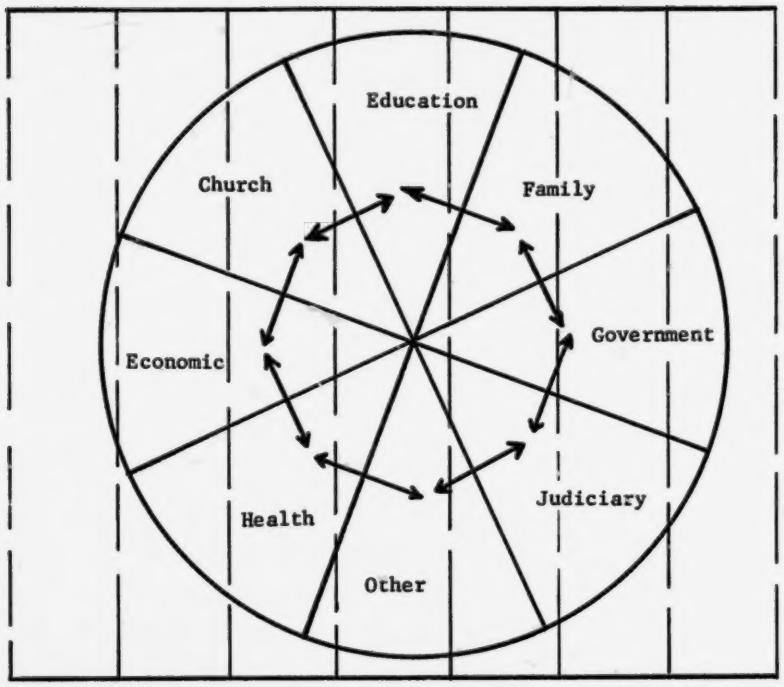

Diagram A

Patterns of racism prevail through the interrelated institutions of society as shown above.

Society, Racism, and Schools. Diagram A provides our starting point. Three things are shown here:

Society consists of a number of intimately related institutions.

Schools are one of the key institutions of society.

Our society incorporates a deep-rooted pattern of racism, one necessarily reflected in and perpetuated by its key institutions.

If these statements hold, then it is hard to avoid the conclusion that schools share in the overall pattern of racism. To avoid this conclusion, to say that schools are somehow different from the other institutions, we should be able to cite a record of substantial and long-term efforts by public education to resist the basic pattern. In the absence of such a record—and, unfortunately, such a record is lacking—it is inconceivable that our schools should be different from the whole.

What is the historical pattern of *de facto* segregation in our city? We will use the following characterization as a working guide:

> A complex set of beliefs and practices for regulating white-Negro relationships (including but not limited to certain types of physical separation), based on explicit or tacit assumption of Negro difference and inferiority.

Superior conditions and consequences for whites.
Inferior conditions and consequences for Negroes.
Degradation of the quality of life for the whole community.
Resistance to change by the dominant group.

Does this racial design for the society as a whole apply to our urban school systems? Let us first look at key elements of the educational process and then consider certain educational consequences.

A Comprehensive Web. We can here only briefly delineate the existence of racism in the key elements of the structure and operation of our schools. There is ample evidence available in the relevant literature to support the characterization made respecting each element. The reader should also note that 1) the elements should be considered not only individually but as comprising a mutually supportive and consistent pattern and 2) most have existed in overt form over long periods with apparent acceptance by educators and the general community.

School district gerrymandering, school location, and pupil assignment practices have resulted in more racial separation of pupils than could be accounted for solely by housing concentrations. This history goes back to the beginnings of public education. Over the years most educators simply collaborated with separation, seemingly viewing it as only "natural."

Historically, virtually no Negro teachers were employed in white areas (though recent pressures are bringing some change here). Negro teachers learned not to bid for jobs outside the ghetto schools. The rationalization that Negro teachers imposed the limitation themselves is, of course, transparent.

The traditional, white-supremacist version of American history continues to be taught in most of our classrooms, although for years now the cry has been raised that a new, authoritative scholarship has amply exposed it as the historical version of white supremacy mythology. This traditional history is a vast attack on the psychological identity of Negro children by robbing them of their heritage as people of African descent and as citizens of this country. At the same time it has helped to perpetuate the illusions of racism among white children.[4]

Materials in other subject areas, from primers used in the first grade on up, have almost invariably excluded Negroes or only portrayed them in menial roles.

[4]Beatrice Young and Benjamin Solomon, "Joy and Conscience in Teaching American History," *Changing Education,* I (Fall 1966), 3-7.

Since the attitudes and expectations of teachers provide the crucial dynamic of education, the question arises: Do teachers share the pervasive orientation toward Negroes? The answer perhaps is that teachers in all parts of the country were exposed in their early lives as much as other members of society to prevalent beliefs and practices. There is little to suggest that college experience typically challenged earlier indoctrination, and the record of professional activity would hardly bear out any theory that teachers have strongly opposed the racial system. Kenneth B. Clark, among others, noted the virtual institutionalization of the viewpoint that a lesser achievement by black students is normal:

> . . . teachers in the New York public school system whom my white students have interviewed said that Negro children are inherently inferior in intelligence and therefore cannot be expected to learn as much or as readily as white children. . . .[5]

The clinching factor often is the belief that Negroes are, in any case, destined for menial jobs. Much vocational guidance openly or tacitly has accepted horizons for Negro youth limited to the narrow range of "Negro occupations." Trade schools have been historically closed to Negroes by union fiat, with the acquiescence of school authorities.

The institutionalization of low expectations, commitment, and standards has been embodied in "difficult schools." Historically these have been schools with grossly inadequate conditions for learning but nevertheless accepted as a permanent feature of the educational landscape in ghetto areas—deteriorated buildings, over-crowded classrooms, insufficient supplies, transient and fleeing teachers, inappropriate techniques, abandonment of standards, low morale, and little learning. Both the school system and community appear to have two standards of education—good schools for white children and "difficult" schools for black children.

White children no less than Negro experience the pattern. We have already mentioned physical separation, denial to white children of Afro-American teachers or principals, and bias in the curriculum. Attitudes and practices in all-white schools often directly or indirectly reflect prevalent community biases. Faculties express no mutual professional concern—whether to try to prevent instances of open or subtle bias in the classroom or to consider the value of integration.

[5] "Clash of Cultures in the Classroom," *Integrated Education*, I (August 1963), 10.

How many all-white schools have asked for Negro children to fill empty classroom seats or have made sincere efforts to recruit Negro colleagues? The pervasive climate in all-white schools is such as to reinforce the notion that Negro schools are an alien part of the school system and that Negro students are different, inferior and not worthy of association with white students.

Educational Consequences. If the key, interrelated aspects of the educational process are indeed infected with society's racial malady, what, then, are the consequences in education?

1. Schools inculate a falsehood. A public school system which has accommodated to segregation becomes a living example of segregation in its structure and operation. Such a system necessarily confirms and supports in the minds and attitudes of its student body the beliefs that 1) segregation is the proper way of life in America and 2) Negroes are racially inferior, the doctrine which underlies segregation. To help perpetuate the falsehood of racial inferiority is to abandon truth as a fundamental striving of education. The falsehood is one of enormous proportions, endangering the very survival of society.

2. The pervasive incorporation of racism in education results in psychological injury to and substandard education for large numbers of Negro children. Much recent history stems from the protest movement finally generated by this fact. Negro children in public schools have been walled off from the rest of society. They have been placed in a system which institutionalizes low expectations, diluted standards, inadequate educational conditions, scandalously little achievement, and psychological attack on black children.

3. Segregated education has deeply dehumanizing effects on white children. Since these are often glossed over, it is worth quoting the eloquent words of Lillian Smith:

> I have never been sure that racial segregation has hurt the Negro more than the white. I am not certain that physical lynching of the few is worse than the spiritual lynching of many white children by their own parents and school and church. . . . What segregation has actually done is to destroy spiritually and mentally millions of its children of both races. Arrogance or shame—which do you prefer that your child feel? A mind deadened to knowledge, or a body shut out of a decent school? An indifference to the suffering of others, or suffering itself? [6]

4. The quality of education is degraded throughout the system.

[6] *Integrated Education,* I (April 1963), 45.

White children as well as Negro suffer from *de facto* segregated education in ways additional to inculcation of the premise of racism. Neither white children nor teachers can be insulated from the effects of substandard education in the Negro sector. The new white teacher who suffers through an assignment in a black school until he can transfer out learns meanwhile to accept inferior educational conditions and standards as normal. This experience tends to corrupt those sensibilities which are most important for the learning process–for the white children he will teach as well as for the Negro. For the system as a whole, the average level of attainment, which sets the standard of comparison and challenge, is lowered by the downward pull of the ghetto schools where standards go by the board. This is no small matter, for the intangible factors of expectation and demand by teachers and community have a great effect on what students accomplish. In biracial schools which appear on the moving periphery of the ghetto, track systems and other methods provide microcosms of the segregation in the larger system. Negroes, kept outside of the mainstream of the educational process, can contribute little to the intellectual life of the school and become the source of complaints that the school is deteriorating. The destructive instability in white communities induced by fear of Negro penetration of their schools turns attention away from the real needs of education to defensive measures or flight.

5. Professional values are subverted. Acceptance of segregated education by teachers–where it occurs–damages the commitment, standards, integrity, and unity of the profession. One glaring example, the color line shown by the absence of Negro teachers in schools in white areas, is an outright violation of professional integrity and a disunifying force in the profession. More generally, the educator who accepts, whether consciously or not, racism in education incorporates in his personality and acts in behalf of values antagonistic to education. Teachers who are caught up in the web of racism often become defenders of it when change is demanded. Such hardening of defensive postures entails further compromise of professional values. The question which haunts them in the rapidly-changing city is: "Will Negroes eventually come to my school?" On the other hand, teachers who see the pressing need for integration may find themselves isolated or harassed if they are outspoken and seek to initiate changes with a sense of urgency.

Racism and the Posture of Neutrality. Our analysis so far points to but one conclusion–namely, that the premise of racial difference enters dynamically into every aspect of school processes. The general pattern

of segregation in society is fully confirmed as existing in and fostered by education.

Nevertheless, we also see that the racial issue is in every sense one *intrinsic to American public education and a responsibility of educators* (and not merely a civil rights cause imposed on schools). It is best defined as a problem of *truth in education*, since racism is built on the lie of humanly-relevant differences among the so-called races. (This lie provides the fundamental link between the issue in education and the broad civil rights movement.) The problem is not simply a "Negro problem" but applies to everyone—children, parents, teachers—white or black (or any other racial group). Further, the problem is not solely, as many discussions of integration seem to delimit it, one of racial separation of students, but encompasses the entire, interwoven pattern of racism in education.

Particularly salient in education are the attitudes and behavior of professional people. The collaboration of school systems with the prevailing racial pattern has meant, in human terms, that teachers and officials—with few honorable exceptions—geared decisions to the overall pattern. The pattern, after all, had its own logic, its own sense of being natural and fitting, its own support from those who shared its premises, and its own tremendous resistance to change. To try to change even one aspect might bring opposition, simply because any change is a threat to the whole. If a teacher should strive for Negro members on an all-white faculty or raise questions about the social science materials, would he not be inviting trouble and notoriety? If a school official decided that attendance boundaries could be drawn to increase integration, would not this incur outraged cries from certain sources? Better, therefore, to adhere to what was normal, established, and expected. In any case, why try to change one practice in what is clearly an overall pattern, one established not only in tried-and-true practice but also in the ingrained mental and emotional habits of many people? Before the issue was forced by civil rights protests, few educators thought of altering it.

The historic rationale of large numbers of school people on the racial issue in education has been a combination of "neutrality" and "color blindness." According to the first, educators should not take sides on such a controversial issue, one outside the province of education. The second concept, color blindness, has tended to reinforce that of neutrality. In effect, it meant that the problem wasn't there in the first place. Teachers, according to this view, did not make distinctions on the basis of race—they did not "see" color in their classrooms or schools.

But the posture of color blindness, whatever virtues it may have

possessed in certain contexts, served mainly as a mask for the continued existence of de facto segregation. The fact is that color blindness never existed in the first place. Virtually every person, including educators, in a city with a racist pattern is intensely aware of color. The common use of the appellations, "Negro schools" or "white schools," is only one example of this awareness.

In short, color blindness and neutrality are false postures: they do not really exist. The racial issue is a real one in society: neutrality in in education can only be a pretense for conformity with the *status quo*. The real alternatives before educators are either to strive for a fully integrated educational process or to collaborate with the existing pattern of segregation.

Integration—An Affirmative Position for Educators. We have seen that underlying the racist design is the false premise of racial difference. This lie has operated as an abnormal, a cancerous interference in Negro-white relationships. However, in a segregated society, abnormality has become normal and even "natural." A concept of integration is in a sense undramatic, since removal of the racist premise would mean only that relationships between Afro-Americans and whites would merely be truly normal--i.e., that they would accept each other and work with each other as ordinary and equal human beings in relationships of mutual respect and understanding.

Thus, from this standpoint, school integration would mean making the existing racist pattern abnormal and substituting for it an educational process in which black and white children and teachers learn and work together as a normal condition and with the development of normal relationships. Remove the premise of racism and people can face each other as people, not as stereotypes.

Any pretense of neutrality clearly must be dropped—the cause of integration in education is inseparable from the cause of education.

Further, the primary locale of necessary change is in white sectors and primary responsibility and initiative should be taken by white personnel, since the "abnormal factor" in relationships is one that basically originates in and emanates from white society. As noted earlier, the question of school integration should not be looked at as mainly a "Negro problem."

In view of the historical situation we are in, school integration requires a tremendous affirmative effort, and teachers are crucial to this effort. Most "solutions" so far have ignored the role of teachers and have emphasized racial balance. But a genuine integration program would be comprehensive—i.e., an interrelated attack on all the manifestations of segregation in education—and it would be led by teachers. It would seek at every given moment to attain the maximum possible

physical integration of children because educators would realize that a biracial classroom is the best context for education in a biracial city. But it would not be hung up on the practical difficulties of achieving full racial balance immediately. It would do what could be done and at the same time come to grips with every other element of racism, tangible and intangible.

The dynamics of such a program can only emerge from a continuing confrontation and dialogue among all the professional personnel—from each school on up through to the topmost levels of the system.[7] Teachers and school officials must learn, no matter how painful, how racism insinuated itself deeply into every aspect of school operations and the consequences thereof. They must come to confront the painful reality that the existence of racism in education manifests more than anything else its existence in the hearts and minds of professional personnel.

Educators must grasp and make real the concept of a thoroughly integrated school system environment, one which reflects their professional determination to undo every vestige of segregation within their reach. The spirit and practice throughout should become such that the new atmosphere will touch positively the hearts and minds of even those children who for a period may remain in all-white or all-Negro schools. Even these children should be able to feel that they are in an environment which has rejected segregation as a way of life and which in many ways helps them to come into meaningful interaction with the world across the barriers.

Integration is a hard road—but it can lead to a solution, to an educational process that is sound, stable, honest, and effective. In contrast, passivity and "neutrality" mean only longer entrapment with segregation, a sure recipe for endless trouble. Educators should be leaders, not the reluctant followers. School integration would mean not only a great advance in education but also a major contribution towards weakening the grip of segregation on the total community.

[7] Benjamin Solomon, "An Approach to In-Service Re-education," *Techniques for Achieving Racially Desegregated, Superior Quality Education in the Public Schools of Chicago, Illinois,* Meyer Weinberg, ed., paper prepared for the National Conference on Equal Educational Opportunity, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967), Appendix C, pp. 38-45 [mimeographed].